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THE EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A POLICY STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

January, 1992

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association is deeply interested in the evaluation of student achievement, and has recently made submissions to the Minister of Education on this matter. (1) Although OPSBA's immediate recent concern was in relation to the National Indicators Program, the whole question of evaluating student achievement needs to be addressed. The lack of clear policy statements on this matter is a source of distress among teachers, trustees, and the public generally, as recent responses to the Ministry's restructuring initiatives have shown. Until these policies are formulated and approved, little progress can be made on the improvement of curriculum and the raising of standards. As concern for Ontario's economy increases, parents and the general public need clear information on student achievement.

OPSBA believes that clarification must begin with affirming general principles. Then there must be a clear delineation of responsibilities at the national, provincial and local levels. Until these steps are taken, confusion will continue. Accordingly, this policy statement deals with basic principles and the division of responsibilities between central and local government.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The prime purpose of evaluating student achievement is to improve that achievement. At the same time, OPSBA AFFIRMS THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY. A comprehensive policy must therefore foster both good teaching practice and public understanding of the results of that practice. OPSBA believes it is possible to maintain the professional autonomy of the teacher in evaluating students and yet be publicly accountable for standards. This can be achieved by following a three-strand system which includes external monitoring, Benchmarks and Comprehensive Student Profiles. This system also enables us to evaluate important skills and abilities which are now recognized to be essential to success in our changing society - skills involving co-operative work, problem-solving, personal initiative, oral facility and higher thinking processes.

1. EXTERNAL MONITORING

Done by a random sampling of an appropriate percentage of students -completely separate from the teacher's responsibility for professional judgement concerning particular students. It must include genuine problem solving and open-ended writing in a context recognizable to students. Results widely published.

2. BENCHMARKS

With the support of local boards, selected teachers should be involved by the Ministry of Education in the development of province-wide Benchmarks. These Benchmarks should be available to teachers as a resource in their evaluation of all students. They should be based on a combination of features from the Hargreaves plan (wider achievement)(2), the recent benchmarks work in Toronto and elsewhere (more variety of performance tasks, fuller coverage of curriculum, more care for the testing situation), and new concepts from OSIS guidelines (peer evaluation, collaborative evaluation, etc.). This program should be developed gradually over a period of years as part of curriculum improvement programs related to the professional development of teachers.

3. COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT PROFILES

Development of suitable comprehensive evaluation for each student at the end of the Transition Years. This would provide a documented profile of each student and would include performance on a battery of proficiency demonstrations as the student reaches the end of compulsory schooling. The purpose of such demonstrations would be to assist the student's life choices as he/she reaches school-leaving age.

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(1) See Appendix 1 for a chronology of OPSBA submissions on student achievement.
(2) See Appendix 2 for the evaluation of wider achievement proposed by Dr. David Hargreaves, London, England.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

- Public confidence in the effectiveness of our education system is linked to our ability to perform competitively in the global economy. For that reason, OPSBA endorses the development of a National Indicators Program which can provide accurate information regarding national standards.

- Each province or territory has responsibility for education in its jurisdiction. Such responsibility includes leadership in all curriculum matters, of which student evaluation is an integral part. Accordingly, Ontario should provide clear and useful evaluation policies, with practical materials, such as models of reporting, made available to all schools for the implementation of these policies.

- Provincial responsibility also includes the monitoring of general standards of student achievement for the province as a whole, and annual reporting on those standards.

- In view of the recent evolution of more sophisticated and accurate evaluation techniques, Ontario must provide for teacher development in the new procedures.

- Local Boards of Education are responsible for creating and implementing coherent evaluation policies within Ministry guidelines, and for fostering public understanding of school achievement patterns.

MEETING EVALUATION RESPONSIBILITIES: SPECIFIC TASKS

With the approval of the principles and the division of responsibilities outlined above agreed upon, all three levels of government can proceed with their tasks. OPSBA endorses the following policy with respect to the nature of specific programs needed at each level. Obviously, the division of responsibilities outlined in this policy is crucial, and forms part of the essence of the policy. For that reason, this policy is affirmed as a unit.

FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY: MONITORING GENERAL STANDARDS

OPSBA endorses the role of the federal government in providing data concerning student retention and achievement in Canadian schools. The Federal government should introduce a monitoring system to measure student performance across each Canadian province or territory, using sampling systems which will provide accurate data for comparative studies and for each participating authority. This monitoring should have the following characteristics:

- Independent evaluation by an external agency
- The monitoring to begin with reading, writing, mathematics and science
- Performance testing on generic skills, based as closely as possible on curriculum commonalities and articulated goals
- Results for the country as a whole published annually
- Increasing breadth over the next decade in skills being evaluated, eventually including oral tasks and complete performance in sustained "life-like" enterprises - some of them technological
- Structured to provide public accountability without interfering with daily instruction
- No student to be involved more than once

PROVINCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES: ESTABLISHING, MONITORING AND PUBLICIZING PROVINCIAL STANDARDS

OPSBA recommends that the Ontario Ministry of Education discharge these responsibilities by clarifying existing and future Curriculum Documents, improving Provincial Review Programs, initiating a Benchmark Program, and creating models for Comprehensive Student Profiles. Specific recommendations for each of these activities are given below.

Clarifying Curriculum Documents

As part of its curriculum responsibility, Ontario should establish clear goals for student achievement at various levels. This clarification will be gradual, and could begin by illustrating program objectives in Ministry curriculum documents with exemplars of student performance. These exemplars should be derived from field testing of guidelines in preparation, or from the Student Achievement section of Program Reviews. They will give reality to the abstract statements of curriculum objectives, and will form an important link with both Provincial Review programs and the Provincial Benchmarks.

The Provincial Review Program

The Provincial Review Program now in effect is described in Appendix 3 of this policy statement. This Program is endorsed by OPSBA, subject to the modifications described in the following paragraph.

Ontario should expand and modify its Provincial Review Program to include more of the curriculum and to put more emphasis on reporting publicly the global measures of student achievement in each subject reviewed. Such global reporting of outcomes need not and should not reveal local information, which can continue to be included in the report to the local Board as it now is. The public document published annually, Report Card for Ontario, should include information about both program implementation and student achievement, and should be summarized in newspaper notices published by the Ministry.

Provincial Benchmarks

OPSBA recommends that the creation of Benchmarks in Ontario be a Ministry responsibility. They should be created as part of an ongoing program for curriculum improvement and teacher training. Committees of practising teachers should be involved together with human resources from the faculties of education and the Ministry of Education.

Ontario's Benchmarks should have the following characteristics:

- They should provide print materials and video tapes demonstrating the range of student performance on a given task
- Benchmarks should be pedagogically useful, providing insight into student learning and into difficulties the student may be having. This means they will also show strengths and weaknesses in the intended curriculum
- Benchmarks should give meaning to the learning tasks required by Provincial guidelines, demonstrating both goals and achievements to parents and guardians
- Benchmarks should be based on collective teacher judgement and assist individual teacher judgement in meeting the professional responsibility for evaluating individual student achievement
- Results of performance tasks in Benchmarks will clearly show changes in standards of student achievement, if such changes occur
- Benchmarks should be useful in future Ministry Policy, pointing the way to both curriculum modification and professional development needs

Comprehensive Profiles

A Comprehensive Profile should be prepared for each student leaving the Transition Years. The preparation of these is the responsibility of the school, but the Ministry should provide models which can be locally adopted, or adapted within prescribed limits. These models or prototypes should make provision for an account of the

student's interests and abilities. Combined with effective individual counselling, such a profile should assist the student's education or career choices as school-leaving age is reached. It will also assist selection processes for employers and provide valuable information in the event of a move to another city or province. Because of its importance, the profile should be developed with the student and the parents involved as much as possible.

In creating these profiles, a re-definition of student achievement is needed. The Hargreaves report to the Inner London Educational Authority in 1984, Improving Secondary Schools, provides that re-definition (see Appendix 2). It declares that pupil under-achievement is directly related to our present view of what achievement actually means. It argues that we have relied too long on the measurement of narrow cognitive, intellectual skills to assess achievement (the skills of memory and written expression, which Hargreaves calls achievement aspect one). We know, and our official guidelines say, that the ability to apply knowledge (aspect two), the personal and face-to-face skills (aspect three) and motivation and self-confidence (aspect four), are also important and can be attained. By identifying these four aspects of achievement, the report calls attention to our failures. We have not created a general understanding of this wider definition of achievement and we certainly have not developed effective means of assessing such factors as motivation and commitment. Yet we have known for a long time that they are extremely important.

LOCAL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES: POLICY AND IMPLICATION

The local Board has responsibility for creating a coherent policy on student evaluation, working within Ministry Guidelines and using Ministry resources, including Provincial Reviews, Benchmarks, and prototypes of Comprehensive Profiles. The Board also has the responsibility for supervising the implementation of this policy and making it known to parents and other citizens.

Accordingly, OPSBA supports a local evaluation policy which:

1. Provides for general monitoring of standards in student achievement through participation in the National Indicators Program and Provincial Reviews.

2. Respects the professional responsibility of teachers to evaluate the achievement of students in their classrooms.

3. Fosters clarity and openness in reporting to parents, and promotes links between parents and teachers so that the home and the school recognize a shared accountability for the student's progress. This involves the genuine exchange of information and the creation of a partnership, with the student also actively aware and involved in assessing progress.

4. Provides for public accountability through national Indicators, Provincial Program Reviews, and local Initiatives such as the use of Benchmarks exemplars in communicating with parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This policy on evaluation of student achievement be approved as the official policy of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

2. This policy statement be forwarded to all member Boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education, and to all Teachers' Federations in Ontario; and that OPSBA seek Ministry reaction to the specifics of the policy as articulated in this document.

3. This policy be forwarded to the Council of Ministers of Education and to the Canadian School Boards' Association.

4. This policy be released to the public media, with an accompanying precis of its principal points.

Summary Chart

THE EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
COMPONENTS AND RELATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

COMPONENTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
(1) External Monitoring · random sampling of appropriate percentage of students completely separate from the teachers' responsibility for professional judgement concerning particular students	· Federal - development of National Indicators program which can provide accurate information regarding student retention and achievement in Canadian schools · Provincial - through expansion of the mandate of the provincial review program, monitoring of general standards of student achievement for the province as a whole and annual reporting of those standards · Local Boards - provide for general monitoring of standards of student achievement through participation in the National Indicators Program and Provincial Reviews
(2) Benchmarks · development, over a period of years, of province-wide benchmarks program · to provide print materials and videotapes demonstrating the range of student achievement on Curriculum tasks · based on a combination of features from the Hargreaves Plan and other new techniques required by Ministry guidelines · Benchmarks to be used as a resource by teachers in their evaluation of all students	· Provincial - development of province-wide bench marks program created as part of an ongoing program for curriculum improvement and teacher training - by clarifying curriculum documents the province should establish clear goals for student achievement at various levels - this clarification will include the provision of clear and useful evaluation policies and practical materials made available to all schools for the implementation of these policies · Local Board - creating and implementing coherent evaluation policies within Ministry guidelines - fostering public understanding of student achievement
(3) Comprehensive Student Profiles · development of comprehensive evaluation of each student at the end of the Transition Years · provides a documented profile of each student · purpose would be to assist student's life choices	· Provincial - provision of models which can be locally adopted or adapted within prescribed limits · Local Board and School - preparation, in consultation with parents and the student, of comprehensive profiles

APPENDIX 1
CHRONOLOGY OF OPSBA SUBMISSIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

OPSBA has made a number of submissions on the importance of student achievement and accountability to the public in general. These have included both official policy statements as well as comments to the media.

CMEC NATIONAL SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS' PROGRAM

- **December, 1990**
  OPSBA Board of Directors' endorsement of CSBA Brief to the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada on the School Achievement Indicators Program

- **March, 1991**
  Ontario Minister of Education decides that Ontario will not participate in National School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)

- **June 7, 1991**
  OPSBA Board of Directors' approves motion to request the Minister of Education to explain the decision that Ontario not participate in SAIP

MEDIA COMMENTS

- **May 3, 1991**
  Toronto Star article "Official Says Ontario rejects national tests because of cultural makeup." OPSBA responds by saying the government "acted prematurely."

- **June 16, 1991**
  Toronto Star "School Boards Calling for National Tests." OPSBA urged Minister "to keep an open mind on national testing...boards are eager to have the kind of information good testing provides."

- **June 30, 1991**
  Toronto Star Editorial "A National Test." "A number of school boards - Peel, the Metro separate board and the Ontario Public School Boards Association representing 91 boards want the Minister to change her mind."

- **December 7, 1991**
  Globe and Mail "Ontario Plans to Join Student Testing Project - Province Says "Concerns" over national evaluation now met." The OPSBA described the decision as "good news - its a win-win."

RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVES

The importance of student achievement and the need for provincial policies on student achievement were stressed in a number of presentations and submissions made in response to provincial consultation on education restructuring.

- **June 6, 1989**
  OPSBA Presentation to the Premiers' Council Education Sub-Committee

- **December, 1990**
  OPSBA Response to the Formative Years Consultation Document

- **May, 1991**
  OPSBA Response to the Ministry of Education Technological Education Consultation Document

- **May, 1991**
  OPSBA Response to the Transition Years Consultation Document

APPENDIX 2
ARE WE EVALUATING THE RIGHT THINGS?

In 1984 a document was published in London, England entitled Improving Secondary Schools, the report of the committee on the Curriculum and Organization of Secondary Schools in the Inner London Education authority, chaired by Dr. David Hargreaves. The report asks the fundamental question: what is meant by achievement? The answer takes a broader view than is usual, and characterizes four types of achievement, as follows:

ACHIEVEMENT ASPECT I

This aspect of achievement is strongly represented in the current 16 plus public examinations. It involves most of all the capacity to express oneself in written form. It requires the capacity to retain propositional knowledge, to select from such knowledge appropriately in response to a specified request, and to do so quickly without reference to possible sources of information. The capacity to memorise and organise material is particularly important. Public examinations measure such achievement in that they are mainly written tests, set with strict time limits and with the requirement that pupils have few or no additional resources available to them. The examinations emphasise knowledge rather than skill; memorisation more than problem-solving or investigational capacities, writing rather than speaking or other forms of communication, speed rather than reflection, individual rather than group achievement.

ACHIEVEMENT ASPECT II

This aspect of achievement is concerned with the capacity to apply knowledge rather than knowledge itself, with the practical rather than the theoretical, with the oral rather than the written. Problem-solving and investigational skills are more important than the retention of knowledge. This aspect is to some degree measured in public examinations, but it is often seen as secondary and less important than aspect I. It tends to be more difficult, as well as more time-consuming and more expensive, to assess than aspect I.

ACHIEVEMENT ASPECT III

This aspect is concerned with personal and social skills; the capacity to communicate with others in face-to-face relationships; the ability to cooperate with others in the interests of the group as well as of the individual; initiative, self-reliance and the ability to work alone without close supervision; and the skills of leadership. This aspect of achievement remains virtually untapped by the 16 plus examinations.

ACHIEVEMENT ASPECT IV

This aspect of achievement involves motivation and commitment; the willingness to accept failure without destructive consequences; the readiness to persevere; the self-confidence to learn in spite of the difficulty of the task. Such motivation is often regarded as a prerequisite to achievement, rather than as an achievement in itself. We do not deny that motivation is a prerequisite to the other three aspects of achievement, but we also believe that it can be regarded as an achievement in its own right. For some pupils come to their schools without such motivation, yet the school succeeds in generating it in them and in such circumstances, both the school and the pupils have made an important achievement. By contrast some schools actively reduce the motivation and commitment of pupils, thereby causing further underachievement in aspects I-III.

In one sense, aspect IV is the most important of all, since without it achievement in the other three aspects is likely to be very limited, both at school and in the future. Working class pupils are particularly vulnerable here, since some of them , because of disadvantaged circumstances, come to school with already low levels of aspect IV achievement; they rely upon teachers, in a way that most middle class pupils do not, for immediate and basic help with aspect IV. If the school does not attend to aspect IV as a central feature of its work, then achievement in the other three aspects becomes improbable. When the school believes it is not within its power to influence aspect IV, the teachers begin to explain the lack of achievement in terms of the pupils' background, and these low teacher expectations become self-fulfilling. And when pupils experience their schooling as a threat to their aspect IV achievement, it becomes rational for them to play truant or to protect themselves by classroom misbehaviour.

We are conscious that our scheme of four aspects of achievement is crude and open to many criticisms. The distinctions are analytical and cannot readily be distinguished in classrooms. Nor is the scheme exhaustive of all that schools are trying to achieve with their pupils. Nevertheless, we believe that the scheme, albeit rough and ready, has some advantages over the everyday and popular conceptions of achievement and underachievement, which stress aspect I and so often under-emphasize aspects I-IV.

APPENDIX 3
ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
PROVINCIAL REVIEW PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The current Provincial Review Program is a curriculum-based assessment program that was introduced in 1986 to provide a mechanism for obtaining information about student achievement and program implementation that could be used for program improvement and for reporting to the public on the quality of education in Ontario. Reviews prior to 1986 focused on program delivery and did not collect any data on student achievement.

The following reviews have been conducted:

1987 ▸ Canadian Studies Geography - Grade 9/10
1988 ▸ Physics and Chemistry - Senior Division
1989 ▸ Reading and Mathematics - Grade 6
1990 ▸ Mathematics - Grade 8, 10 (General), and 12 (Advanced)

The next review to be conducted will be writing at the Grade 12 level. This review will be administered during the 1991/92 school year. No review is scheduled for 1990/91. Ontario is participating in an International Assessment of mathematics and science for 9-year-old and 13- year-old students.

A multi-year schedule for the Provincial Review Program is being developed in conjunction with the Benchmarks Program. Once benchmarks have been developed and implemented for a given program, a provincial review will be conducted to determine whether or not these benchmarks are being achieved.

For each provincial review, samples consisting of 100 English-language schools and 100 French-language schools are selected to provide the provincial data. The participants of the review include all students and teachers in these schools who are involved in the program under review. Data is collected by the following instruments: school questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, student questionnaire, and assessment booklets containing achievement questions. The questionnaires contain background questions, questions about school policies and resources, questions about teaching methods and classroom activities, and attitude statements. Instruments are developed by committees of teachers, consultants, principals, and university professors.

Each review is conducted over a period of four years:

- Year 1 ▸ development of instruments and pilot testing
- Year 2 ▸ administration of the assessment
- Year 3 ▸ data analysis and reporting
- Year 4 ▸ follow-up

Each school board is also given the option of conducting a board review using the instruments developed for the provincial review. A board review requires the participation of all students and teachers in the board who are involved in the program under review. The board is assessed a fee of $200 per school. The Program Implementation and Review Branch provides the required instruments, conducts the data analysis, and produces a board report and reports for each school in the board. No student-level data are reported.

Two provincial reports are prepared for each review. The Report Card for Ontario is a six-page report which provides a brief summary of the results, and is intended for teachers, parents, and the general public. The Report Card for Educators is a comprehensive report which contains a description of procedures and instruments, a detailed presentation of results, and a discussion of the results. This report is intended for school board personnel, principals, teachers, and ministry personnel. Assessment strategies other than multiple-choice questions are used to evaluate achievement. These include written responses, hands-on activities, and the collection of student work done during the year.

MATHEMATICS REVIEWS (GRADES 6, 8, 10, & 12)

In mathematics, the written responses ranged from simple numerical answers to geometric constructions and full solutions to problems. The solutions to problems were marked for correct solution and were also categorized by problem-solving strategy.

In Grades 6 and 8, teachers observed students performing a variety of tasks which included solving problems, doing geometric constructions, constructing graphs, conducting measurements, making estimations, and using the calculator.

GRADE 6 READING REVIEW

Each test booklet contained a number of reading passages on a common theme. At the beginning of the booklet, the students were asked to write two things they knew about the topic. This served as a pre-reading activity. In addition to narrative and expository passages, materials such as advertisements, recipes, tables of contents from books, and library reference cards were included. Students answered multiple-choice and written-response questions about the passages. A cloze passage was also included. At the end of the booklet, students were asked to write two new things that they had learned about the topic.

GRADE 12 WRITING REVIEW

The writing review will be conducted in 1991/92. A number of questionnaires and checklists will be used to collect information on the implementation of the writing process. Three samples of student writing will be collected.

1. Assigned Writing Task

Each student will produce a piece of writing on an assigned general topic. The writing will incorporate all phases of the writing process and will be done over three to five class periods. Resources will be provided to be used during the pre-writing activities to provide information and to stimulate ideas and discussion. Teachers will be full participants during the pre-writing activities. Students will be encouraged to discuss their compositions with other students, but students will not be permitted to rewrite each others' compositions.

2. Student-selected Best Piece

Students will be asked to submit the piece of writing that they feel represents their best writing during the year. Students will explain why they chose a particular piece.

3. A small number of complete writing portfolios will be collected. They will be used to document the implementation of the writing process. They will also provide a base of information for the development of resources for the evaluation of writing portfolios.

(from "Student Assessment in the Province of Ontario," a paper presented by the Ontario Ministry of Education at the Toronto Board of Education Invitational Conference on Evaluation, May, 1991)